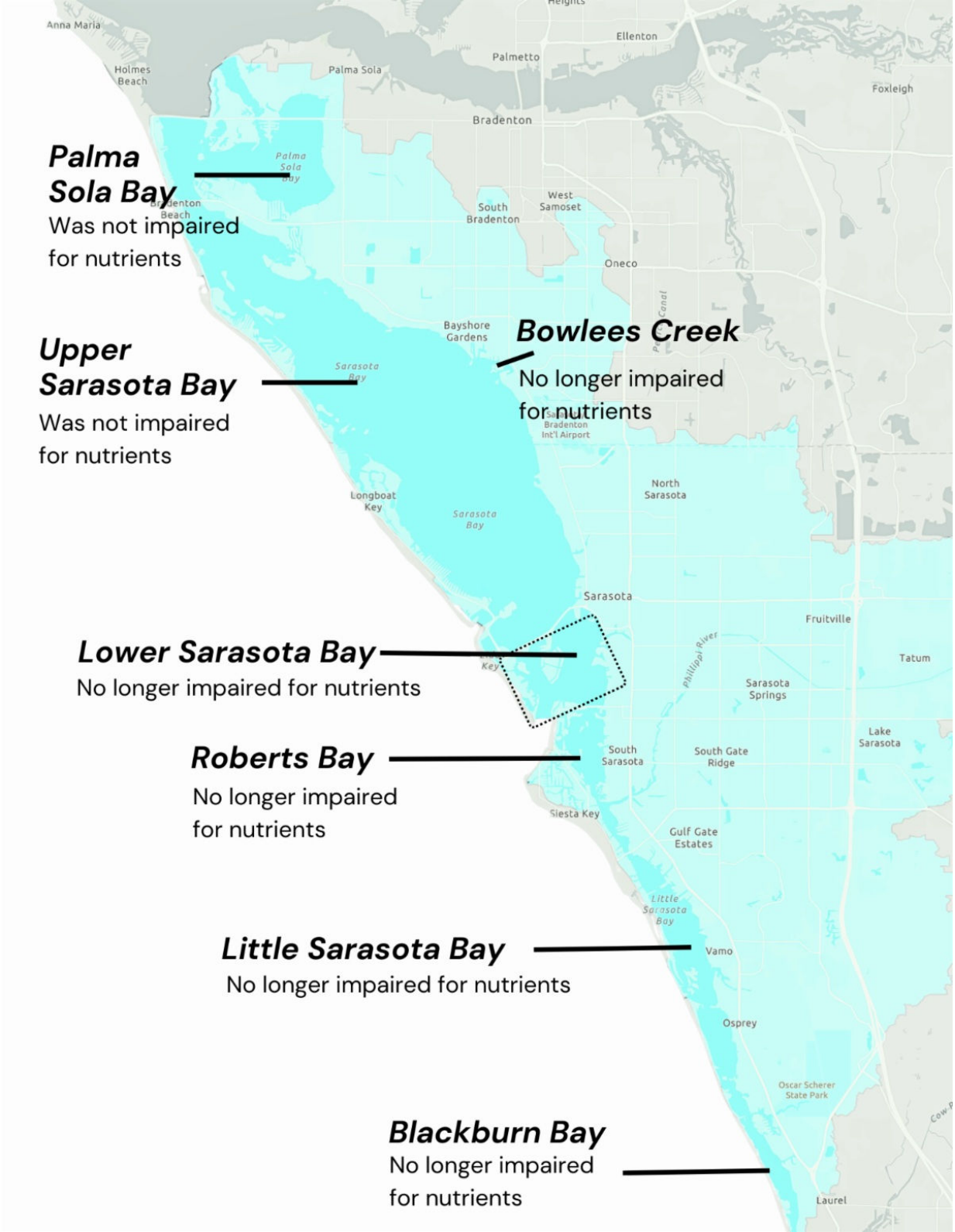


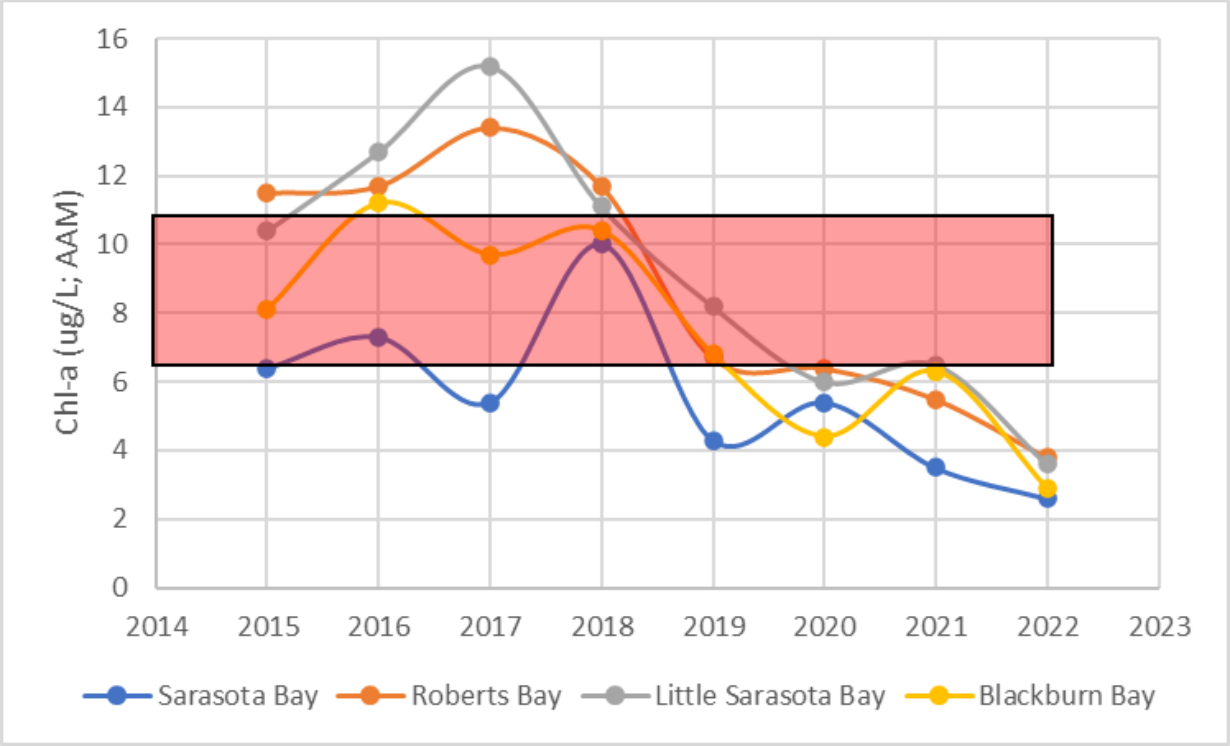
Water Quality Improving in Sarasota Bay but Protections still Encouraged

This past month, staff from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) informed the SBEP that five of our waterbodies are on FDEP's "draft de-list list". This list, not yet fully enacted, represents water bodies where water quality has improved sufficiently that the State no longer considers them to be out of compliance with established water quality standards. The relevant standards, which represent the amount of algae in the water column, were developed by SBEP's consultants, and then reviewed by the SBEP's Technical Advisory Committee. These values, which are considered threshold values for nutrient enrichment, were then reviewed and approved by both FDEP and the US EPA. It should be noted here that there are other impairments that still exist, such as those for bacteria, in various creeks and waterways.

Pending the FDEP Secretary signing off on the de-list list, there will be five water bodies in Sarasota Bay that are no longer considered "impaired" for nutrient pollution, based on improving water quality. Those waterbodies include that portion of Sarasota Bay between Ringling Causeway and Siesta Drive, Roberts Bay, Little Sarasota Bay, Blackburn Bay, and Bowlees Creek, located in Manatee County. The part of Sarasota Bay between Ringling Causeway and Manatee Avenue was not considered impaired by nutrients to begin with, along with Palma Sola Bay. These five water bodies represent half of the total number of de-listed water bodies in all of Southwest Florida.



This graph below shows the trend over the past eight years in the amount of algae (represented by the photosynthetic pigment chlorophyll-a) in the four open water bay segments. The data show that our worst water quality (highest amounts of algae in the water column) were back around 2016 to 2018, with improving conditions the past few years. The red box represents the range of chlorophyll-a targets set for our bay segments, with the lower limit representing the target for Sarasota Bay, and the upper limit representing the higher values set for Roberts Bay. All bay segments have fallen below their respective water quality targets for the past three years, which is the basis for them being put on the de-list list.



But why did this happen? Is this due to the lack of rainfall this year? Well, the lack of rainfall in 2023 is part of why water quality looks good this year, but the data set used by FDEP ends in 2022, not 2023. Of the eight years examined, five of them had above-average rainfall, including two of the last four years shown. Instead, a more likely reason for the improving water quality is that our stakeholders have done a great job responding to our water quality issues. In the worst years shown above, we had over 400 million gallons of treated but high-nutrient wastewater effluent released into our watershed – activities that were not allowed under their operating permits. Those events totaled more than 30 tons of nitrogen, equivalent to dumping over 12,000 bags of fertilizer into our waterways. The shutting down of those overflows is being addressed through actions such as the more than $250 million spent to expand and upgrade the Bee Ridge Water Reclamation Facility, the largest wastewater treatment plant in our watershed. Also, large regional stormwater retrofits in the Hudson Bayou watershed and the nearly complete Bobby Jones Golf Course stormwater treatment project are helping as well.

Having so much of our bay on the de-list list is something this community should be proud of. But it's also not a permanent change. If conditions deteriorate again, those same waterbodies can be put back on the impaired waters list. To ensure that doesn't happen, SBEP and its partners are shifting our efforts from working with FDEP to develop a Reasonable Assurance Plan towards the development of a Water Quality Protection Plan. A Reasonable Assurance Plan is meant to help stakeholders attain water quality goals, while a Water Quality Protection Plan is meant to help stakeholders maintain water quality. Both will require additional action, but the fact that we are showing solid signs of improving water quality is a good sign that our seagrass coverage can recover as well – which also appears to be happening!

Read the article in the Bradenton Herald

Read more about water quality in Sarasota Bay

FISH Preserve Ribbon Cutting Celebrates Decades-Long Restoration Effort



This coming Friday, November 3rd, SBEP along with EPA Region IV Administrators, Board Members of the Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage (FISH), and representatives from Manatee County will be joined by the public to celebrate the completion of the restoration of Cortez FISH Preserve. The site, which sits along Sarasota Bay on the south side of Cortez Road, was bought and protected by The Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage in 2000. Over time, partnerships and support from SBEP, EPA, the Southwest Florida Water Management District, Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, NOAA, Manatee County, EarthBalance, ESA, Rick Richards, Inc. and others began transforming the coastal habitat piece by piece. With significant support from the EPA through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, SBEP and partners were able to carry out the last, large phase of work to complete the restoration vision.

Jay Leverone, the Staff Scientist at SBEP, has overseen much of the restoration work. "FISH Phase 4 is the culmination of nearly 15 years of phased restoration at this 99-acre coastal site. The overall project now provides nearly 40 acres of tidal wetland nursery habitat for

commercially and recreationally important fish species. The upland areas offer roosts for ospreys, eagles and hawks, and ground cover for other wildlife. Plans are underway for trails, bridges and educational signage to complete the experience for visitors."



Mullet swimming up a created channel in one of the earlier restoration phases of FISH Preserve

Read the article in the Bradenton Herald

SBEP Director to Speak at EcoSummit



This December, the Gulf Coast community will be coming together for lively, solutions-oriented lectures, panel discussions, storytelling, and music. Dozens of national, regional, and local experts will share insights and future-forward innovations for recharging our environment and reducing our impacts – crucial to sustaining our coastal community's environment-based quality of life. Dr. Dave Tomasko will be joining other National Estuary Program Directors from around the state to discuss the status of our waters and smart ways to keep us and our waterways healthy now and into the future.

The event is also being held in conjunction with the Green Living Expo (December 2-3 at the Sarasota Municipal Auditorium) and EverGreen Days at The Bay (Nov 30-Dec 6 at The Bay Park Sarasota). You won't want to miss this!

FLASH SALE STARTS TODAY!
One week only November 1-7 half-off all tickets!

Learn more & reserve your spot at the EcoSummit

Bobby Jones Stormwater Project Progressing, Public Input Sought on Nature Park Nov 15



The City of Sarasota continues to make progress on the refresh of the Bobby Jones Golf Course, located on Circus Blvd. on the north side of Fruitville Road. The course, which is nearly 100 years old, is being updated, while half of it is being converted to a nature park and regional stormwater retrofit project for portions of Philippi Creek. The site is expected to provide stormwater treatment for about 9 square miles of land upstream, almost all of which was developed prior to modern stormwater treatment regulations. When completed, the site is anticipated to reduce downstream nitrogen loads by over 4,000 pounds, which is the equivalent of about 900 bags of fertilizer. SBEP is providing funding for additional wetland plants for this project, so that it would reach its highest efficiency faster. Hats off to the City and all the partners working on this effort!

Read the Director's Note

Provide Input on the Design of the Nature Park

When: November 15th, 4PM - 6PM
Where: Robert L. Taylor Community Complex, 1845 John Rivers St, Sarasota, FL 34234

The City will be hosting a community meeting gather feedback on the park's design. The current design can be viewed on **https://www.letsplaysarasota.com**/. If you are unable to make the meeting, you can also email your feedback to ParksAndRec@SarasotaFL.gov by November 30th.



Save the Vets Save the Bay Program Kicks Off with More Opportunities to Participate



SBEP recently awared a Bay Partners Grant to the Multicultural Health Institute and Wayne Adventures for a health and welness program for veterans, especially those dealing with PTSD.

This past weekend marked the first event, and over the next year, the program plans to take participants kayaking in various locations while also integrating paddle cleanups, mindfulness, and mental health resources. Trips are scheduled for the following Saturdays:

- November 25, 2023 - Bowles Creek cleanup
- December 6, 2023 - Phillippi Estate Park cleanup
- January 13, 2024 - Whitaker Bayou cleanup
- February 10, 2024 - Neal Preserve
- March 9 , 2024 - Ken Thompson Park cleanup
- April 13, 2024 - Pine Island- Braden River Rookery cleanup
- May 11, 2024 - Phillippi Estate Park cleanup
- June 8, 2024 - Robinson Preserve

It's not too late to join! If interested, contact those listed on the flyer below:



SBEP Welcomes New Citizens Advisory Committee Members

SBEP would like to welcome two new members, Mekayla Baliles and Betsy Grimes, to the Citizens Advisory Committee!

Betsy is a Ringling College of Art and Design student majoring in entertainment design and a member of the Lazarus Engaged Learning Program. She is very passionate about marine conservation and has previously volunteered with SBEP. She also works with other nonprofits in the Sarasota area utilizing her artistic skills to help the causes of those nonprofits.

Mekayla (pictured on right) is the general manager of Harts Landing, a waterfront bait and tackle shop in Sarasota Bay. She helps rescue pelicans and other wildlife from entangled fishing gear. In an effort to prevent such impacts, Mekayla developed a wildlife-friendly fishing program for her staff and local fishermen. She is passionate about doing her part to keep Sarasota Bay clean and healthy!



Join SBEP's Citizens Advisory Committee

Community input is integral to our mission. The SBEP Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) is a group of local individuals who gather six times per year to provide SBEP with input and to help us share information with the public. Our CAC members have a wide array of professional and personal attributes, but they are all tied by their dedication to the health of Sarasota Bay. Interested in joining? Click the button below to learn more or email megan@sarasotabay.org for a prospective member application.

Learn more about the Citizens Advisory Committee

Save the Date: Bay Partners Grants Open Jan 1

Starting January 1, 2024 applications for the Bay Partners Grants Program will be available online.

Grant funding is available to Non-profit, for-profit, schools, and government organizations located within in the Sarasota Bay watershed for projects that enhance wildlife habitats, water quality, environmental education, or community engagement in and around Sarasota Bay. A total of $100,000 is available for 2024 awards. Each applicant

can apply for up to $10,000. Match is not required but encouraged. Awards are reimbursement grants. Our 2024 grant cycle opens January 1 and closes March 1. Projects may occur between June 2024 and Sep. 2025.

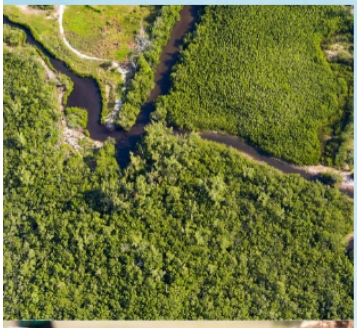


Learn more about Bay Partners Grants

A Year in Review

Thank you to all the partners and volunteers who helped make 2023 a hit!

2023 IMPACT REPORT









19 Habitat restoration projects completed

125 Acres of environment enhanced or restored

252 Volunteers participated in bay restoration and cleanups

1,300 Citizens and students engaged at bay programs or events

4,900 Linear feet of shoreline protected or improved

8,500 Native plants installed at bay preserves

27,000 Pounds of debris removed from local waterways

(Data from program-led and sponsored cleanups)

Lights, Camera, Action!

SBEP in the News

Communication is vital to the protection and restoration of the bay. Check out the latest clips and articles featuring SBEP efforts.



Sarasota's inaugural Bay Fest a big hit

"A couple of hundred people attended Sarasota's inaugural Bay Fest at Ken



Sarasota Bay's water quality improves

"Researchers have now discovered that water quality has significantly improved, and that's

Thompson Park and the Sarasota Sailing Squadron last weekend. Bay Fest was joint effort between Sarasota County and the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program that helped explore the wonders of underwater worlds."

why the state removed it from the list of nutrient polluted waters, but there are still some areas of concern, so they're also suggesting ways to keep the area healthy."

Read More SBEP in the News

Jobs & Funding Opportunities

- **Environmental Defense Fund: Energy Policy Manager - St. Petersberg**
- **University of Tampa: Assistant Professor, Biophysical Oceanography - Tampa**
- **Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council: Planner/Senior Planner - Tampa**
- **Florida Aquarium: multiple positions - Tampa**
- **Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium: multiple positions - Sarasota**

Bite Sized Bay News



Is Gulf Gate golf course purchase on the horizon?

"The Sarasota Board of County Commissions is considering a plan to purchase a former 49-acre golf course within the neighborhood and preserve and enhance the property for stormwater storage, clean runoff into Sarasota Bay, and to potentially reduce flooding in the area.'" **Read more**



Mote's Sea Turtle Protection Zone initiative urging boaters to 'Go Slow for Those Below'

"Mote scientists have documented boat-strike hotspots along the Suncoast and created the voluntary Sea Turtle Protection Zone, which stretches from Longboat Key to Siesta Key, including Sarasota Bay." **Read more**

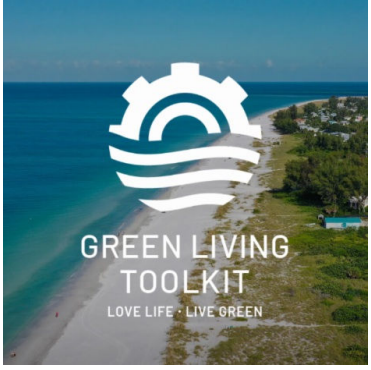


A Chance at Resiliency

"The Florida House has set up a special committee to deal exclusively with hurricane relief and resilience, and a local lawmaker will head up the effort. A total of 15 state representatives will serve on the panel, all from different parts of the state that have been impacted by hurricanes." **Read More**

Community & Partner Events

Check out upcoming green events from over 100 local organizations on the NEW **Green Living Toolkit Community Events Calendar!**



Book a Speaker from SBEP

SBEP staff members regularly speak to homeowners, neighborhood, and community groups and upper-level classrooms about Sarasota Bay ecology and restoration.

Request a speaker from SBEP

Follow us

Contact us

info@sarasotabay.org | (941) 955-8085
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Sarasota, FL 34236

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